SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 7,1997

# Automotive

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## Spunky Civic EX is Fat on Value

## CAReport



By Anno Fracassa Avanti NewsFeatures

I remember the first time I test-drove a Honda Civic. Too many years ago to say, but it was so small that I felt claustrophobic in it.

claustrophobic in it.

For a company that had its beginnings in the small-small car market, Honda is now going bigger and bigger with its vehicles. And it's working because the Give outsold every other vehicle in its class last year.

This 1997 Honda Givic EX is still classified by the EPA as a subcompact, however. You certainly won't be disappointed in the mileage numbers, that's for sure: 30 mpg in the city and 36 on the highway.

the highway.

The Civic gives you a lot of choices to fivour individual needs. It comes as a sedan, a coupe or a hatchback and in DX, LX and EX trim levels. Driven was

the EX coupe.

There's a lot of room in the back seat

There's a lot of room in the back seat on this coupe. The Civics of old were, essentially, two-seaters with a back seat that touched the rear of the front seats. The back seat of the 1997 Civic is adequate for an average-sized adult to sit comfortably back there.

I liked how the front seats got out of the way for back seat passengers. A simple tug on a lever did it in one motion. Push the seat back and it locks to where it was set before. Honda calls it a "passenger walk-in feature." Whatever.

ever.
Front seats are comfortable and are cloth-covered. The rest of the interior of the Civic is laid out well, from rear-seat



cupholders (OK, they're not really cupholders, but the kids used them for their drinks) to the instrumentation. Even the large glass area, which gives it a greenhouse effect (gee, was it hot when I got in), provides superior visibility all the way around.

Instrumentation is smart and simple. Three round dials in front of the driver gives you the tach, speedometer and fuel and oil levels. All controls are up high. The radio is on top of the center cluster and the heating is below that. Under that is a storage compartment and cupholders. There's a small center console that really wouldn't hold too much, but it's there if you need it.

The EX tested had a power moonroof (that's standard) that I didn't really care for. I thought the buttons to operate the thing were confusing. They're little drawings of care on the buttons. I guess I don't read "car" well or some-

thing. It took more than a few minutes to figure it out.

The other annoyance was the 5-speed manual transmission. My foot got pretty sore because of the high resistance on the clutch pedal. The pedal also goes very deep, and that may be part of the problem as well. The Civic is outfitted with a driver's foot rest, which helps a little.

What I did like most about the Civic EX was the styling. It's really pretty, really sporty and has a very aggressive look to it. And you've just got to get this car in "Ina Red" — it screams at you.

The Civic had so much attention grabbing red to it that I got tickted for going IO over the limit on my way to picking up my little girl on her first day of kindergarten — my first citation in a decade.

I'll bet if my car was in Vogue silver or Cypress green, things might have been different. Oh, well.

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The other nice feature about the Civic is its large trunk — it's got lighting everywhere, by the way. So many cars don't have cargo lights anymore and it's a shame. The trunk's large enough to accommodate two large 31-gallon storage lockers — and there's still plenty of room to spare.

One more for the wish list. A better keyless entry system. Sure, it'll let you in and out of the ear well. But there's no button for the trunk to pop open. You've got to use the key to get in.

Call me silly, but the reason I would purchase keyless entry is because, mare often than not, your hands are full of packages or something and you don't want to set them down on wet pacement to get the key in the trunk lock.'

Almost forgot about the engine. The Civic EX has the 1.6-liter single overhead cam 16-valve 4-cylinder VTECH — a strong, proven engine — that pow-See Civic, Next Page

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